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NEW YORK TIMES
20 March, 1985

IRANIAN OFFENSIVE HAS BEEN CRUSHED, U.S. OFFICIALS SAY

By BERNARD GWERTZMAN

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 19— Senior Reagan Administration officials said today that Iran appears to have suffered a crushing defeat in a weeklong offensive aimed at ending its military stalemate with Iraq.

In their assessment of the fighting in southeastern Iraq, along the border with Iran, the officials said Iran sent 30,000 to 50,000 soldiers and poorly trained "volunteers" across the border and that most of them were killed, wounded, or captured in an Iraqi counterattack.

"I don't think the Iranians know how many people they have lost," one senior official said, "but it is in the tens of thousands, we think."

Several Factors in Assessment

Administration officials said they based their assessment on several factors: intelligence gathered by Western countries, presumably through various electronic means; reports from Western observers, including journalists, who visited the battle area in recent days; close analysis of statements made by Iraq and Iran, and information gleaned by American and other Western diplomats in Baghdad and by Western diplomats in Teheran, where there is no United States mission.

As recently as Monday, American officials were saying that the fighting was indecisive, but today, senior officials were firm in asserting that they had no doubt that the Iraqis had decisively defeated the Iranians in the latest conflict.

Soviet-Made Missile Used

In what Administration officials regard as a desperation move, the Iranians also launched a few Soviet-made surface-to-surface missiles against Baghdad, the Iraqi capital, and at least two are believed to have exploded in the city. The missiles, known as Scuds, date from the 1950's. They are cumbersome battlefield weapons fired from a tractor-like vehicle and are very inaccurate at the 150-mile distance from Iran's frontier to Baghdad.

The missile has been supplied to Warsaw Pact nations and to Egypt, Syria, Libya and Iraq. It can carry both nuclear and conventional warheads, but the Soviet Union is not known to

have ever allowed its nuclear weapons out of its control.

American intelligence officials assume that Libya sold the missiles to Iran, one official said.

"The question we're all looking at," one senior official said, "is whether the size of the defeat will finally convince Khomeini to end the war." He added that there had been no sign from Teheran that the Iranian leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, was ready to seek a negotiated peace.

The Iranians are sending diplomats to many countries to explain their position. Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati went to Syria. Libya and Algeria over the weekend and other officials went to Turkey and the United Arab Emirates to seek support.

The Iranians have been saying they would like a new agreement not to attack populated areas. In recent days, Iraqi planes have attacked Teheran, Isfahan and other Iranian cities, inflicting moderate casualties. Iran, with a much weaker air force, made one attack on Iraq that resulted in casualties in a Baghdad suburb, officials said.

The Iraqis, in turn, have issued a warning that commercial planes flying

to Teheran are now in danger of being shot down, and this has led to the hurried departure of many foreigners working in Iran who feared they would not be able to leave later on.

American analysts say the Iranians, who had been building up for the offensive for months, attacked through the Huwaizah marshes. The thrust of the assault came from east of Al Amarah and Al Qurnah, towns on the Tigris River north of Basra. The Basra to Baghdad highway, a militarily significant north-south road, also goes through those towns.

American officials say the Iranian Army intended to cut the road and isolate Basra to the south. That would have been a major victory for the Iranians, who apparently hoped it would break the Iraqi resolve and lead to the resignation of President Saddam Hussein, whose ouster Iran has made a condition to ending the war.

In the initial phase of the latest attack, March 11 to 14, the Iranians were believed to have fought their way to the eastern banks of the Tigris, and in some places actually crossed it and set up positions at the road.

American analysts said the Iraqis, who had been expecting the attack, had built up a well-entrenched defense with artillery and tanks and used Soviet-made helicopter gunships and fighter planes effectively.

The Iraqi counterattack in the last three days crushed the Iranians, the American officials said. "The Iranian

offensive turned into a suicide attack because the Iranians could not match the Iraqi air or artillery and they were cut down by the thousands," one official said.

Another official said the battle "was a classic example" of a well-trained and well-supplied army prevailing over thousands of infantry troops lacking artillery and air support. He said the Iraqi defense was patterned on Soviet tactics, calling for well-entrenched firepower.

Iran Says It's Winning

The Iranians have not acknowledged that they suffered any losses, and in their communiqués are still saying they are winning. Neither Iran nor Iraq releases much information about its military operations, and independent reports on the battles are not available.

Iranian forces remain in control of Majnoon Island, which they seized in February 1984. That area is close to the scene of the current fighting, but was not involved in the latest battles, the American analysts said.

The Iraqis, who took foreign journalists to the scene of the latest fighting, asserted that as many as 100,000 Iranian soldiers were involved and that about 30,000 were killed and the rest wounded. The American figures are much more conservative.

Each side is believed to have amassed 500,000 soldiers on its side of the border. The American officials believe the Iranians either were reluctant to commit more troops to this battle or lacked the equipment and logistical capability to use them.